



Dermatology Patient Education

Tinea Versicolor

While we can't see it, we all have yeast living on the surface of our skin. When it is hot and humid, yeast tend to grow more quickly. An overgrowth of yeast on the skin can cause tinea versicolor, a common skin condition. Tinea versicolor is often called a fungal infection because yeast is one type of fungus. Unlike other types of fungal skin infections (such as athlete's foot or ringworm), tinea versicolor is not contagious.

WHAT DOES TINEA VERSICOLOR LOOK LIKE?

Tinea versicolor can appear anywhere on the body.

- The first sign of tinea versicolor is usually small, light-colored spots on the skin.
- Spots may be tan to pink or very faint
- As the yeast grows, the spots can combine and form patches of lighter (or darker) skin
- Some spots can be dry and scaly
- The fungus affects your skin's pigmentation. Therefore, if you have dark or suntanned skin, pale spots become more noticeable.

WHO GETS TINEA VERSICOLOR?

The yeast that causes tinea versicolor lives on everyone's skin. It is not clear why the yeast overgrows on some people's skin and not others.

- Both light-skinned and dark-skinned people get tinea versicolor.
- People who have oily skin, such as teens and young adults, get tinea versicolor more frequently.
- Children and older adults rarely develop tinea versicolor, unless they live in a tropical climate.
- People who live in tropical areas can have tinea versicolor year-round. Those living in non-tropical areas usually see tinea versicolor disappear during the cooler, drier months.



Tinea versicolor

HOW DO DERMATOLOGISTS DIAGNOSE TINEA VERSICOLOR?

A dermatologist can often diagnose tinea versicolor by looking at the skin. If the dermatologist needs to confirm the diagnosis, the doctor may scrape a bit of skin to look at it under a microscope. This close-up view can show the dermatologist if this is indeed tinea versicolor.

Another way to confirm tinea versicolor is to look at the skin with a special device called a Wood's lamp. The dermatologist will hold the Wood's lamp about four or five inches from the affected skin. If the patient has tinea versicolor, the skin appears yellowish green in color when viewed using this device.

HOW DO DERMATOLOGISTS TREAT TINEA VERSICOLOR?

Before prescribing treatment for tinea versicolor, your dermatologist considers several factors, including where tinea versicolor appears on your body, how much of your skin is affected, and the weather where you live.

Treatment for tinea versicolor may include:

- **Topical (applied to the skin) medications.** Depending on the severity of your tinea versicolor, your dermatologist may recommend a prescription-strength or over-the-counter anti-fungal shampoo, soap, cream or lotion that can keep the yeast under control. The active ingredient in these products is usually selenium sulfide, ketoconazole, or pyrithione zinc.
- **Medicated cleansers.** Tinea versicolor often returns when it is warm and humid outdoors. Using a medicated cleanser with one of the above ingredients once or twice a month, during warm and humid periods, can help.
- **Oral (taken by mouth) medications.** If your infection covers a large area of your body or frequently returns, your dermatologist may prescribe anti-fungal pills. Due to possible side effects and interactions with other medications, your dermatologist will closely monitor you while taking this medication.

Although the yeast is easy to control and does not cause scarring to the skin, it can take weeks or months for your skin to return to its normal color.

HOW DO I MANAGE MY TINEA VERSICOLOR?

Dermatologists recommend the following tips to help people with tinea versicolor:

- Use skin care products that say non-comedogenic or non-oily.
- Wear loose clothing
- Wear sunscreen to protect your skin from the sun and do not use indoor tanning beds. A tan makes tinea versicolor easier to see and prevents your skin tone from evening out.
 - When selecting a sunscreen to protect your skin, make sure to use a sunscreen that:
 - Offers broad-spectrum protection, which means the sunscreen protects against the UVA and UVB rays of the sun and helps prevent skin cancer and sunburn.
 - Has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.
 - Is water resistant for up to 40 minutes or 80 minutes.
 - Is non-greasy (Look for labels that say non-comedogenic).

A board-certified dermatologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating the medical, surgical, and cosmetic conditions of the skin, hair, and nails. To learn more about tinea versicolor, visit aad.org or call toll free (888) 462-DERM (3376) to find a board-certified dermatologist in your area.

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